

COMMUNICATIONS,
THE COMMONWEALTH
AND THE FUTURE

PROFESSOR DAVID DILKS

Vice-Chancellor

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**COMMUNICATIONS,
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THE COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING



THE
UNIVERSITY
OF HULL
PRESS

Introduction to the Inaugural Lecture

The Commonwealth *of Learning* is pleased to be sponsoring this series of lectures which is intended to celebrate the Commonwealth and to pay tribute to those men and women who, by their dedication, wisdom and foresight have sought to give expression to the ideals of partnership and co-operation to which the Commonwealth is committed.

Partnership and co-operation, along with consultation, have served as the springboard for Commonwealth action across a wide spectrum of human needs, and The Commonwealth *of Learning* seeks to use these approaches in taking advantage of the innovations in education and the advances in communication technologies to address the development of human potential. It is perhaps also worth noting that this Commonwealth initiative, born of the imagination and vision of Commonwealth leaders and made a reality through the goodwill of people in many lands, exemplifies the great legacy of the Commonwealth and its sometimes unacknowledged worth.

Like open learning, whose philosophy The Commonwealth *of Learning* espouses, this series of open lectures which the organisation is proud to present, is designed to reach out to as wide an audience as possible, and to 'open up' people's minds to the richness of the Commonwealth heritage, to the many examples of Commonwealth achievements, and to the continuing relevance of the Commonwealth ethos in a world that is becoming more interdependent.

The University of Hull has for many years admitted a large number of Commonwealth students, many of whom now occupy key positions in their own countries. More recently, the University has taken some of its courses to far-flung parts, strengthening its links with students overseas and plans are being made, we understand, for further initiatives in this regard. We are privileged to be able to launch this Lecture Series here at Hull and record our appreciation for the University's generosity and support. We are fortunate, too, to have Professor David Dilks, the present Vice-Chancellor, a historian of considerable distinction, deliver the first lecture in the series. Those who know the Commonwealth know of his deep and abiding interest in its affairs and its evolution to which both he and his wife Jill have contributed immeasurably.

Lord Briggs of Lewes, former Provost of Worcester College Oxford, Chancellor of the UK. Open University and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Sussex, historian extraordinaire and man of letters, was the first Chairman of The Commonwealth *of Learning*. It was my privilege to serve for five years as President of COL under Asa, and one could not have asked for a wiser, more knowledgeable, and understanding Chairman.

Asa's interests span both communications and education, and indeed it is the convergence between the developments in communications technology, and the demands on education for greater access and better quality, that informed and inspired the genesis of The Commonwealth *of Learning* and its subsequent development.

It is a measure of the stature of the man and of the responsiveness of his mind to the demands of change, that at the first meeting he chaired of the Board of Governors of COL, he readily volunteered the view that his original report which foreshadowed a Commonwealth University but led to the establishment of The Commonwealth *of Learning* was already history.

Asa's contribution to COL's evolution and development in difficult, and often trying, circumstances will long be remembered, not least by those of us who were honoured to have worked with him. The first Commonwealth Open Lecture is a special tribute from the Organization to a man to whom it owes much for its existence and its many achievements.

It is altogether fitting, on the occasion of the inauguration of this Lecture Series, that the University of Hull conferred on Lord Briggs the degree Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*, and thereby joins with us in saluting this eminent and highly regarded scholar in whose debt the Commonwealth will long remain.

James A. Maraj
President, The Commonwealth *of Learning*

We often use on our degree days a phrase which increases its force this evening, 'Welcome to our commonwealth of learning'. It is an expression favoured by Sir Charles Morris, formerly Vice-Chancellor of the University of Leeds; and those words were perhaps in the mind of Lord Briggs when, as chairman of a group which reported in 1987, he entitled *Towards a Commonwealth of Learning* a proposal to create what was then called 'The University of the Commonwealth for Co-operation in Distance Education'. It is also a phrase which suits the world of Universities, for it reminds us that our first duty is to knowledge, and not only to that knowledge which is deemed immediately useful. The word 'commonwealth', meaning a shared possession, something of richness and value, embodies another part of our purpose. Hence the motto of the University of Hull, *Lampada Ferens*, 'bearing the torch', passing the flame of learning from the hand of one generation to that of the next.

Had this evening's proceedings consisted only of the admission to that commonwealth of Lord Armstrong, who will shortly become our Chancellor, and Lord Briggs, who has been Chancellor of the Open University for sixteen years, this would have been an ever-memorable occasion in its own right. But the other Commonwealth of Learning, the one that spreads its beneficent influence in many directions from Vancouver, pays the University a compliment which I hasten to acknowledge. That Dr Macdonald, Lord Briggs' successor as Chairman of the governing body of the Commonwealth of Learning, should come from Canada to preside redoubles our sense of obligation; and the fact that he is President Emeritus of York University speaks of the intimate contacts between this part of England and Canada, for his York University is not the one lying forty miles from here but the one which reminds us that what we now know as Toronto was once called York. Not far from that York we find the names of other places dear to us; Whitby, Pickering, Scarborough. In Canada, every political constituency is called a 'riding', a term of which visitors from Yorkshire can give convincing explanations. A couple of hundred miles from Toronto, we find another city of Hull,

lying immediately opposite Ottawa but on the Québec shore of the river.

In the present year, we have here at this Hull students from thirty-five Commonwealth countries. Shall I surprise you by saying that the large majority of our students come from the Commonwealth? That will be amazing only if you forget, as we all too readily do, that Britain herself is a member of the Commonwealth. At any given moment, we are also teaching about 1,200 students overseas, people who do not come here for their courses, but to whom we send our staff, in places ranging from Harare to Lahore, Kuala Lumpur to Singapore, Hong Kong to Sydney. I need hardly add that our students and visitors come and go to all parts of Europe, the Americas, the Caribbean, Africa, just as traders and merchants have gone from this great port over many centuries. The Pilgrim Fathers began from a place near here their storm-beaten voyage to found a colony in the New World; Captain Cook sailed these coasts a hundred and fifty years later from Whitby before he surveyed the St Lawrence river and Newfoundland, charted New Zealand, Australia, New Guinea, Java, the Cape of Good Hope.

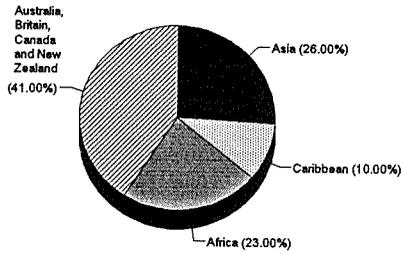
No more than a few generations ago, the rest of the world was mysterious, remote, dangerous; information about it percolated slowly and fitfully. So great is the transformation in our affairs wrought by the techniques of modern communication that we transmit news and pictures in a trice from one end of the world to the other; nation can speak peace, or war, unto nation across the continents; we sit on the campus of this University and by video-conferencing discuss matters across the table with colleagues in Vancouver or New Delhi or Sydney. These themes - the nature of the Commonwealth, and especially that part of it which concerns learning; the opportunities opened for us by the revolution in communications; the prospects of making something of those opportunities amidst competing claims - are those which I wish to broach tonight. I need hardly add how high a sense of honour I feel to give a lecture marking the services to the Commonwealth of Learning of Lord Briggs, whose friendships span

the globe, whose interests are innumerable, whose sympathies inexhaustible and whose energies irrepressible.

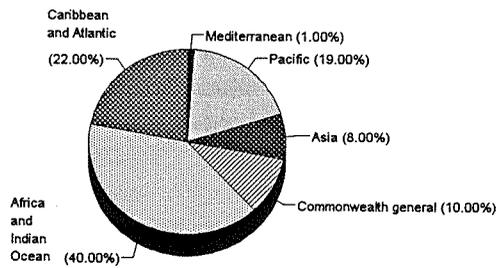
My purpose is also to do what a university ought to do: to speak about the little-mentioned or noticed, to consider subjects which are neglected; to be critical, not for the sake of casting stones or scoring points but because universities must test from one generation to the next ideas which may once have been accepted but are no longer in their full vigour, or which may be derided by fashion but worthy of a kinder fate. You will notice a certain concentration on Britain's role in the Commonwealth, which I hope will seem appropriate since the lectures will from year to year be held in different countries, where the emphasis will properly be otherwise; next year, we understand, Canada, and in 1996 India.

In seeking to make a theme so vast manageable in the compass of the hour, I hope to be pardoned for not dilating on the work of the official Commonwealth; which does not in the least mean that the work undertaken by official agencies is not of the first importance. The monitoring of elections in many countries; the impetus, much increased in recent years, of the Commonwealth Secretariat and of individual Commonwealth governments to maintain or introduce democracy and decent standards of public life; the perpetual warfare against drug-trafficking and abuse; efforts to help the pitiful tides of refugees; all the complexities of heavy indebtedness and falling prices for primary commodities in the Third World; mitigation of the injustices of the terms upon which many of those countries have to trade - all these are areas, and not the only ones, in which the official Commonwealth plays a substantial role. Its programmes are effective. They are by international standards economical; very much more so, for instance, than those of the World Bank or the World Health Organisation. (See diagrams on page 4.) But in broad terms those activities are necessarily the preserve of governments or of the Secretariat in London; and it is part of my thesis that the Commonwealth must be far more than an assemblage of governments if it is to do for the world what it should.

Where the Commonwealth experts come from (May 1993)



Where they work



It is not, you understand, a federation but an association which is by its nature different from the European Union or those regional groupings which rely on the proximity of the members to each other. The fifty states of the Commonwealth cover a quarter of the habitable surface of the world, and contain a quarter of its population; about 1.4 billion out of a total of 5.5 billion. That figure, incidentally, has more than doubled since 1950. Even on the lower estimates, the 5.5 billion will have risen to some 8 billion by the middle of the next century. In the same period of less than two generations since 1950, the food production of the world has risen in total, but has gone down in relation to the population.

Britain is sometimes described as lying at the junction of Europe's weather systems. Here, the fronts and currents and eddies contend for mastery. Did not Robinson Crusoe himself, setting sail from Hull on 1 September 1651, find that 'The ship was no sooner got out of the Humber than the wind began to blow, and the sea to rise in a most frightful manner ...'? We still stand at the junction of many international alignments. Britain is the chief point at which Europe, the close relationship with the United States, NATO, the Western European Union, the Commonwealth, come into play and cross. Indeed there is no other power with the same set of connections, though that is not to deny that we are less strong relatively than we were a generation ago. Without any desire to be contentious, let me say that it is no less than tragic to see the notion almost unconsciously accepted that to be 'pro Europe' implies a hostility or indifference to the Commonwealth; or conversely that a profound interest in the Commonwealth precludes a serious interest in Europe or even in the more advanced forms of European unity. This supposed division, and the alleged impossibility of spanning those two broad relationships, have been a commonplace of British politics for many years and one which has done nothing but harm.

To put it at the lowest, the Commonwealth represents an enormous investment of British talent over many generations. Yet it has faded from our minds in this country with astonishing speed in the last generation or two. It plays no part in our General Elections, and little

part in our general consciousness. No doubt it is true that the trading partnerships were bound to diminish, the patterns of investment to alter, the military needs to change. We have had nothing sufficiently solid to put in their stead and I need hardly argue that if we say little about the Commonwealth in our newspapers or television coverage except in case of disaster, if we will not place Commonwealth subjects in our National Curriculum, if we will not make sure that the new generations understand something of the nature of this association, then we must expect the inevitable result.

The point may as well be put bluntly. Prolonged attacks upon the British Empire as little more than an organised system of exploitation and robbery, and the confrontations over some thirty years on account of South Africa and Rhodesia, have done untold damage. The Commonwealth has been a political liability for every British Prime Minister at some phase or other of his or her tenure for thirty years. You may well retort, 'Our backs should have been broader'. Perhaps so; but it is the fact that to be accused of such a degree of sinfulness, by representatives of countries whose own régimes would not always bear - how shall I express it tactfully? - the most rigorous scrutiny, has created tensions in this country which only the hardiest enthusiasts for the Commonwealth have been prepared to endure.

The new situation in South Africa and, with a little luck, that country's rejoining of the Commonwealth, ought to help greatly. At last we have an opportunity to concentrate upon something more positive. Nor is it only a question of relations between states. The Commonwealth is often wrongly equated with governments, whereas much of its most valuable activity is sustained in other circles. Properly regarded, at any rate for us in Britain, the Commonwealth offers wonderful opportunities to study the literature and cultures, the geography, the politics, the history of half the world, for it is impossible to take a serious interest in Commonwealth affairs without considering the United States, Central Asia, most parts of the Far East, practically every region of Africa. We are constantly told from the overseas Commonwealth that a renewal of British interest and faith is earnestly desired. Many of those who lament our indifference

and wonder at it, often in genuine bewilderment, should ask themselves whether they cannot now act in a way which makes that renewal a more practical possibility.

All this provokes the question, 'Why does Britain matter in this context?' The answer is partly because of the junction; partly because we are still in terms of output easily the strongest of the industrialised Commonwealth countries; partly because we retain a substantial Commonwealth infrastructure. If others were there to pick up the torch and reinterpret the message, to find new ways of revitalising the Commonwealth, it would be another matter. Of that there is little sign. In this country, we do not find a carefully-informed hostility, a judgement made upon a measured examination of the facts that the Commonwealth has nothing left to offer; it is a question of newer fashions, a sense of guilt, often an attitude of a somewhat careless neutrality or, among people who feel more warmly to the Commonwealth than that, a fluid goodwill.

The philosopher and statesman Edmund Burke remarked that public life is a situation of power and energy. 'He trespasses against his duty who sleeps upon his watch, as well as he that goes over to the enemy.' Very well; then we must judge whether in our generation we are trespassing against our duty or merely watching the genteel decline of an association which had its uses years ago? If the Commonwealth fades away in a haze of neglect or nostalgia, or becomes an association valued by only a handful of people, should we care?

Let us first address openly the weaknesses: the distances; the cost of travel; poverty, illiteracy and disease; what my distinguished predecessor and devoted Commonwealth servant all his life Sir Roy Marshall calls 'the excess of dependency', too poor a balance between those who have resources and those who do not; a membership about half of which consists of small islands; populations of no more than 10,000 in Nauru or Tuvalu, of 85,000 in Dominica, of 250,000 or thereabouts in Barbados and Brunei, to take two widely different examples, about the same number as in the city of Hull. All that stands by contrast with 870 millions in India, which if the present

trends continue will have a population as great as that of China by 2010 or 2020. (See diagram on page 9.) The crumbling of the Russian Empire means that there is far less of an incentive nowadays for the richer countries to purchase goodwill, or to nod and wink at abuses, or to endure abuse themselves. We do not have so many towering figures as in the old times; let us think of Mr Nehru or Sir Robert Menzies, Mr Lester Pearson or Field-Marshal Smuts. There is a seeming lack of inspiring and original enterprises upon which the Commonwealth is engaged. You will say, 'Is that not a full, perfect and sufficient litany of weaknesses?'

Maybe; but if we turn to the strengths, we find that between a third and a quarter of the membership of the United Nations consists of states of the Commonwealth; we notice the high respect in which many Commonwealth enterprises and institutions are held; the spanning of the continents whose interlocking fortunes ought to be more obvious to us even if, rather perversely at a time of increased speed and ease of travel, we concentrate upon regional associations; the network of contacts and reservoirs of sympathy, especially in the older generation.

When we speak of communications, we think first of the telephone, television, radio, air travel. Until quite recent times, the control of such communications lay within the hands of governments, at least if they so determined. Travel could be strictly controlled, and sometimes still is; radio broadcasts and television and telephone communication could be cut off. The coming of new techniques and especially of the satellites has changed all that. There is no question that every civilisation, in places however remote, is directly affected. We need only to consider the part which such communications played in the collapse of the Russian Empire. However, we must also ponder upon 'communications' in wider and subtler senses. What is the effect upon us of shared language? How much of our culture and outlook is determined, through processes of which we are scarcely conscious, by the literature of our own country and others? A few weeks ago the Indian and Chinese students preparing for the degree of Master of Business Administration in this University held a dinner. One of

Commonwealth countries

Distribution by population size 1994

(8) >100,000

Dominica, Grenada, Kiribati, St Kitts & Nevis, St Vincent & the Grenadines, Seychelles

(16) 100,000-1m

Antigua & Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Brunei Darussalam, Cyprus, The Gambia, Guyana, Maldives, Malta, Solomon Islands, St Lucia, Swaziland, Tonga, Vanuatu, Western Samoa

(12) 1-10m

Botswana, Jamaica, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Trinidad & Tobago, Zambia

(14) <10m

Australia, Bangladesh, Britain, Canada, Ghana, India, Kenya, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Uganda, Zimbabwe

them, already occupying a senior position in India, described how he felt immediately at home in Britain when he came here for the first time at the age of forty. When he asked himself how this could be, he discovered it was because he had been brought up to speak English from his early childhood and even more because he was familiar with much of English literature. Thus, he said, 'I found myself to my surprise and delight not a stranger in a foreign country, even though it was at the opposite end of the world from my own, but at ease and curious to see with my eyes what I had imagined so often with my mind.' In sum, today's communications furnish us with opportunities for self-knowledge on a scale which would have been out of the question even a generation ago.

If we wished to make a claim for the unsung Commonwealth, we might say that its principal characteristic, especially at those meetings which deal with functions rather than politics, is that the people in the room often know each other well, want to get on and generally do. They have come there to make something happen. We talk of our common heritage, and about the fact that, uniquely in an international association of such size, we need no interpreters. But we do need to interpret to each other, in ways beyond the formalities of language, our different histories, situations and hopes. The common heritage is of supreme importance because it provides a level without which such intimacy and collaboration are impossible. What matters more for our fragmented, not to say tormented, world is the mixture of common inheritance and diversity. It is the mark of the civilised man or woman to take other people's cultures and languages seriously. That does not in the least mean that we have to be neglectful or disdainful towards our own. It is also the mark of a good university to inculcate those habits of mind in the young.

Academic life, broadly defined, is the main strand of our former association in which the Commonwealth connections are still recognisably strong. That is not true to the same degree in the trading associations or among the military or the politicians; but in the world of universities, the commitment and enthusiasm are still visible. By 'commitment' I mean a willingness to make some sacrifices. Whether

it will be so in ten or twenty years' time is another matter. Joint degrees, grants for conferences, funds for departmental links, shared research, student exchanges, they are all of them splendid. Every one of those activities is declared to be indispensable for the new Europe; every one of them is generously funded from Brussels; every one is just as desirable or more in the Commonwealth connection.

Students everywhere are seeking eagerly an international dimension to their education. Sometimes that can be achieved, and very well achieved, in the time-honoured fashion of going for a course of three years here or one year there. But for most that is out of reach. The fresh techniques of distance-learning - learning off the screen, off the page, off the tape - if only we will seize the chance and see how to direct it, open splendid new opportunities within the Commonwealth because one language, one text and one programme can be widely used, or quickly adapted. I have never met a European colleague in politics, business or academic life who would not give his eyes to have the range of contacts and ease of entry all over the world which we take for granted, nor one who understands why we do not make more of that priceless asset. In too many of our Commonwealth affairs, we resign ourselves with a sigh to the repeated statement 'I'm afraid there are no resources for this'. If that makes us sharp and effective, so much the better. However, it is often no more than a recipe for ineffectiveness. We almost expect to be treated as the poor relations; and so long as we do behave thus, I fear we shall be so treated.

Of all Commonwealth students pursuing courses abroad, over a half are in one country. 'Ah well,' you will say, 'at last some cheerful news; it must be Britain.' But it is not. That country is the United States. Less than a third of all Commonwealth students taking courses outside their own borders are going to another Commonwealth country. The world-wide total is about 1,200,000. Of those, only 15% study in any Commonwealth country; 36% of the whole number are in the United States; and 30% in the European Union. It is true that Commonwealth student mobility has picked up somewhat in the last five years and that is by itself a cause for rejoicing. But 60% of the entire Commonwealth flow comes from three places, each of them

small: Hong Kong, Malaysia and Singapore. I shall not linger on the question of fees, which has been the subject of anguished exchange now for years. Perhaps it is enough to say that the fees are pitched in Britain, as in other major Commonwealth countries, in such a way that without substantial help from scholarships, there are few who can come here except from the richer places. Time and again the consequences of such a policy have been pointed out. The heads of Commonwealth governments themselves have warned that without a real stimulus to this mobility of students, the most able, outgoing and lively people of their generation, future relationships within the Commonwealth association will be impaired. In the House of Lords a few days ago, the Chancellor-elect of the University pointed out that this is a state of affairs which we must change. We must also think outside conventional boundaries. We should try to bring more of our Commonwealth students into direct contact with the European Union and with central and eastern Europe. There is room to adapt the ERASMUS and the CUSAC schemes in that sense, so that students by a series of linkages between our universities and others will have the additional opportunity to attend a course in mainland Europe.

One footnote to all this; it is plain that if universities and senates mean what they say about the damage done to their international connections and long-standing friendships by the rapid increase of fees in the last ten years, they must demonstrate that they are doing all they can from their own resources before they can expect ministers, civil servants, the businesses and the charities to respond.

If it is true that these connections all over the world are both valuable and at risk, if the Commonwealth opens, as I firmly believe from experience that it does, magic casements to a wider world, do we have the means of making more people aware of the opportunities, so that they can at the least test such assertions for themselves? Do we have a means of making the undercurrents of opinion and conviction about the Commonwealth run more strongly? In other words, can we do anything of substance, other than wait for action by ministers and officials? Here are some suggestions in shorthand:

- a) Education about the nature of the Commonwealth itself, especially in schools. We need well-written guides, showing how the Commonwealth can be brought into the study of geography, history, politics, literature, environmental studies.
- b) Television. The astonishing range of useful and often noble activities undertaken by Commonwealth agencies, sometimes official, sometimes private, is scarcely known even among the experts. Could not several of the big Commonwealth broadcasting corporations collaborate to make a series worthy of the theme?
- c) Contacts and exchanges between the professions. Of them all, that of school teaching is the worst provided for in this context and most others; but if we accept that the Commonwealth badly needs the support of the young, we must first capture the enthusiasm of their teachers.
- d) Youth exchanges. Well organised, especially if they entail some hospitality in the homes of the country visited, such exchanges widen horizons in a wonderful way and produce lifelong effects. Plenty of people in university life can testify to that at first hand.

Some of these are activities which only the resources of government, the expertise of the non-governmental organisations, and the enthusiasm of individuals, brought together, will allow to flourish. It all sounds untidy; it is; but all those ingredients are necessary. To return to the list:

- e) Research about the Commonwealth itself. Serious study of the subject in academic circles is confined to a tiny band of people.
- f) Scholarships for students, especially the postgraduates, and for post-doctoral Fellows and young members of academic staff. None of us can be satisfied with a situation in which the

Commonwealth's provision of higher education for overseas students is actually declining in relation to that of other states or associations. If such visits have to be for the short term, that is far better than nothing.

- g) School linking. For the vast majority of younger citizens all over the Commonwealth there is no hope of travelling to another Commonwealth country. We do not have to throw up our hands and say nothing can be done. Links between the schools produce enlightening exchanges of material ranging from school magazines and individual letters to competitions by post. It is the process which Sir Winston Churchill used to call 'the lighting of new fields of interest in the mind'. It costs very little in terms of money, a good deal in time and enthusiasm.
- h) Medical collaboration. The field is almost illimitable. We should encourage more of the health authorities and hospitals in this country to strike up partnerships abroad, as colleagues in our new Postgraduate Medical School are doing. The scheme under which medical students are enabled to spend an elective period of training abroad is an excellent one and ought to be expanded. The cost is modest. The reports which the students send back are generally remarkable and often moving. There seems no doubt that the people who have undertaken that service will be better doctors by far in their own countries than they could have been without such an experience; some will make a career in the overseas Commonwealth; and even if that were not so, the practical help which they give in field stations and hospitals, generally in conditions beyond our imagination, is of the utmost value. Senior medical colleagues generally cannot spare six or twelve months but can sometimes manage a few weeks; and a well-planned visit can produce an inspiring effect upon their colleagues abroad. We need to acknowledge what is little understood outside a small circle of specialists, the parlous

state of medical training in some Commonwealth universities, especially in Africa.

- i) Collaboration about food, prices, agriculture. Even this, a huge subject, cannot be a matter for governments alone. On the best predictions offered to us, the shortage of water will bring about in the next twenty years an actual decrease in agricultural production in the developing world and an increase in or near the developed. It is scarcely necessary to explain what that would mean to most Commonwealth countries.

- j) Turning the Commonwealth's experience to the use of a wider community. For example, can we not extend in the Commonwealth the methods which have been used in the last five years by the British government in Central and Eastern Europe, through the medium of the Know-how Fund? Is there not room for a Commonwealth volunteer force, much on the lines of the early days of VSO?

All of which brings me by several routes to the Commonwealth of Learning. That is the most imaginative project which the Commonwealth governments have funded in recent years. It was at first intended to be a university, though of a peculiar kind. For a variety of reasons, the COL became something different. All the same, Lord Briggs and his colleagues in their report of 1987 stated as their object that 'Any learner, anywhere in the Commonwealth, shall be able to study any distance-teaching programme available from any college or university in the Commonwealth'. The conception is simple, bold, appealing. In less than five years of work, the COL - as we know from experience here - has become a valued enabling agency, but not one which merely grasps what is available and then distributes it more widely. Part of its purpose is to enable people in one part of the Commonwealth not only to take programmes off the shelf, but to adapt them or propose new means of using the techniques of communication over long distances. The COL itself has been an active promoter of those techniques. It has brought many into contact

with each other who would never have met otherwise. It has not attempted to persuade us that to put materials into a package will be quite sufficient, or that teachers and books are rendered obsolete by the new methods. Rather, Professor Maraj, himself a valued Honorary Doctor of this University, and his colleagues have shown us new paths. The Rajiv Gandhi Fellowships will enable 100 students from nineteen Commonwealth countries to obtain Masters degrees by distance-learning, which will be achieved through the Indira Gandhi National Open University in New Delhi. I cite that example to indicate that here is something which the Commonwealth is doing which other associations cannot do, or do so readily. If for no other reason that should cause us to support it. The use of self-standing materials means that some of the chief difficulties can be surmounted: for example, great distances and inadequate transport; remote and inadequately stocked libraries; out of date laboratories. Especially in Africa but also in other poorer parts of the Commonwealth, the universities have a desperate need not to lag in information technologies; they require not only equipment, but even more the training and the people.

May I add, Dr Macdonald, that the COL would do a signal service if it could introduce into its offerings something which will explain the working of the Commonwealth, no doubt with the deficiencies as well as the virtues; it would be all to the good that those for whom new horizons are opened should realise that their advancing knowledge and skills derive from something which the Commonwealth itself is doing.

You will see that all this is not simply a plea for vast sums, though it is true that to act in a serious way upon some of these suggestions - especially when we remember the huge and growing numbers of people in the Commonwealth - would cost no negligible amount. By comparison with the money freely spent by governments and businesses on other enterprises, the cost would be modest. Let us concede that even that price could be justified only by values upon which an accountant cannot put a price. Rather, these proposals amount to a plea for partnership, for a more actively helpful world, for

the practical against the grandiose, and the organic against the theoretical.

We are conscious of a paradox of modern communications. The speed of modern travel makes the miles melt away; the new communications bring images from all over the world to us, perhaps to the point where our reactions become frozen, cauterised, and our emotions satiated. We sometimes console ourselves with talk of the global village and even create cosy images of a society of manageable size where genial people have mild disagreements and learn to rub along with each other. Alas, it does not seem to be that kind of village which we inhabit. Instead, the swiftness of travel and ease of communication have run far ahead of our sensibilities and structures. When President Bush talked about the new world order he had in mind security against aggression, the prime duty of every government. But there is another kind of security; security against famine, disease, corruption, civil war. Even since the hopeful days of 1990 and 1991, the new world order seems to look like the old world disorder. Maybe that description will not do. Is it a new kind of disorder? At least in one of its aspects, little noticed so far, the new order is assuming a different character and one which may well make the nature of the Commonwealth appear in a more favourable light, for power in the new world does not reside to the old degree in great agglomerations of people or huge acreages of territory. If that seems a surprising remark, think of what has happened in Russia; look at what is happening now in the European Union, devised forty years ago to bring together a vast population and massive resources because they were held to be the indispensable bases of strength of any great state. Who would have imagined even a few years ago that governments all over the world would be deliberately divesting themselves of control of what used to be called the commanding heights of the economy? And then there is the involuntary or unconscious shedding of power. Consider what has happened to flows of capital, of attempts to defend currencies at a given value and, most of all, what has happened to the flow of information which is now beyond the control of governments.

The industrialised nations of the world have roughly 25% of the population and something approaching 85% of its income. However we juggle the figures, the message is plain enough. If we wish the Commonwealth to be a more useful association, there are four essentials: first, that we do not deceive ourselves about the present state of affairs by pretending that all is well. In truth, the Commonwealth has seldom been weaker. Secondly, more people must have better information about it if the association is to command a heartier allegiance. Thirdly, it must have the informed support of the intelligent young. Finally, if we are not prepared to exert ourselves, let us not blame fate but place the responsibility where it ought to lie, on our own lack of will. How to share the resources of the world more equitably, to feed enormously expanded populations, to avoid irreversible biological damage, to secure higher living standards without ruin of the environment? Those are issues of the first magnitude, and all span the undeveloped as well as the developed world. They matter as much to the one as to the other. If the Commonwealth could make a distinctive contribution to debate and action upon those issues, that alone would justify its existence amply. Can any of us doubt that whether we like it or not, those are questions which will confront us with an increased intensity?

Just over ninety years ago, that young blood Mr Winston Churchill, recently elected to Parliament, gave dinner with a group of his friends to the Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain. It was in the spring of 1902 and the Government had found itself in deep Parliamentary troubles. Various of the young men had failed, as the leaders of the party thought, to display the needful degree of vigour on behalf of the government. Mr Chamberlain upbraided them. They replied, 'How could we possibly support the Government when its action has been so inept and arrogant?' He retorted, 'What is the use of supporting your own Government only when it's right? It is just when it's in this sort of pickle that you ought to have come to our aid.' I offer this anecdote only in case it may seem to possess a momentary relevance to political affairs in this country. To continue: the company heard Mr Chamberlain at his captivating best. They dined in style. He stood at

the door and said to them, 'You young gentlemen have entertained me royally and in return I will give you a priceless secret. Tariffs! There are the politics of the future, and of the near future. Study them closely, make yourselves masters of them and you will not regret your hospitality to me.'

How I wish I could pronounce so tersely and decisively! But are not education, migration, population and deprivation the politics of the future, not the whole of politics but an increasing part, and of the near future at that? Racial antagonisms; desperate poverty; preventable disease when the medical skills are there elsewhere in the world; starvation when in other places we are paying to grow food we do not want, then paying to store food we do not like to throw away, and then paying to destroy food we cannot eat - does not all this strain our consciences beyond the limit? How seriously do we intend to concern ourselves with the fates and interests of those who cannot for the moment force their concerns upon us in any compelling way? Do we care, beyond the shores of mere talk, about international collaboration? Do we have a better instrument at our hand than the Commonwealth, with all its admitted imperfections? If so, by all means let us put our strenuous efforts behind that. If not, should we not remind ourselves forcefully of the Commonwealth's merits, and use all the opportunities which it offers?

If you will allow me to adapt slightly another saying of Burke, we should need for such an enterprise to rear to the most perfect vigour and maturity every generous and honest feeling that belongs to our nature. These are not fashionable accents. Perhaps they have vanished from our minds, in which case so much the worse for us and, far more important, for many others. Perhaps what I have tried to say will sound no more than visionary. But if ever there is a time when we should raise our sights and minds to more distant horizons, it is on an occasion such as this. The Bible tells us that young men dream dreams and old men see visions. It is for us as your teachers to distil from experience what seems most important and valuable, to separate the passing from the enduring, to distinguish between the flimsy and the solid. An old saying has it 'If only youth had the knowledge, and

if only age had the strength.' The Commonwealth of Learning, to which our renewed thanks, is based upon a mixture of self-help and outside help, upon the proposition that when people of goodwill and talent put their minds to it, they can do something useful for each other; and on the conviction that in our Commonwealth affairs, we must not presume upon the past, or pretend that a valued association will continue in vigour without exertion. To us in this University, it seems plain that the handsome endorsement which the heads of government gave at their meeting in Cyprus a few months ago to the Commonwealth of Learning should now be translated into a secure future and an enlarged budget. That would be the most satisfying of tributes to Lord Briggs, who has been so prodigal of his gifts for so long in the service of so many.

I remarked that we need a partnership between governments and businesses and charities and individuals; but we shall make little headway unless we can find the basis for another partnership, between the generations. I see before me in the Middleton Hall tonight young people from the schools of Hull and many of our undergraduates and postgraduates, ranging in age from perhaps 18 to the early 30s. Let me address these final sentences to them. You are entitled to expect from us of an older generation knowledge and understanding. All of you, if you choose, will exercise a considerable influence on your fellows in this country and in the overseas Commonwealth. Some of you already occupy substantial positions in public life or industry or the professions; and within a few years, many more of you will. Communications in all their definitions will serve humane and useful purposes, the Commonwealth will by its effort and example help the world to grapple with some of its looming problems, only if you will bring to the cause your energy, your generosity, your courage. It is late in the day, and nothing less will do.

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